

SEWARD COUNTY - BREAKING THE CODEPENDENCY CYCLE

Kathy Broeker may be 100 percent blind, but she sees life much more clearly now

Codependency.

It was a word Kathy Broeker was unfamiliar with.

But life's challenges over the years made the meaning clear for this faith-filled woman.

Kathy began to notice vision problems when she was only 30. "When I would be playing volleyball, I kept missing the ball and couldn't understand why," she says of the early signs. Her night vision got worse and her field of vision began to narrow. In the later stages, only a small area of central vision remained.

Doctors diagnosed her with Retinitis Pigmentosa, an inherited disease in which the light-sensitive retina of the eye progressively degenerates and blindness results. Other than knowing the disease is inherited, research has yet to uncover much information, and no treatments are currently available. Over a period of around ten years, Kathy lost all her vision.

During this time, it became increasingly difficult to care for her children and work a full-time job, and the stress of an unhealthy relationship which eventually ended in divorce.

The faith she had been taught as a child was her main source of sustainment, and the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired wasn't far behind: "The Commission for the Blind is just awesome. They know where your fears are. They gave me my first cane, and taught me how to get around by myself and the technology I needed to be competitive in my job. They think you can still do everything independently -- they just teach you alternative methods and that is a wonderful philosophy."

LIKE ANY LOSS, the loss of Kathy's eyesight affected the entire family and they had to learn how to deal with the disease as well. There was also a strain on the marriage which eventually led to divorce. Kathy was now a single mother of two teens while being 100 percent blind. She continued to work as a receptionist despite the sight handicap, citing that almost 80 percent of blind people never find a job.

Several years later, Kathy met a man who seemed to be the ideal mate. "He sent me flowers and just made me feel special," she smiles. "I just knew this time around that I had found the right man."

Following a short courtship, Kathy gave her furniture away to her children, sold her house in Seward, quit her job and gave up everything to marry the man she was sure was her knight in shining armor and the two moved to Washington.

"God brought me out of my first divorce like you wouldn't believe. He set my feet on solid ground. Well ... I threw it all away and went back after my addiction which was a husband. I wasn't patient enough," she looks back. "When I got to Washington it was codependency again."

She was counseled by her pastor and a counselor from the Commission of the Blind to leave. Kathy made arrangements to get back to Nebraska and the marriage later ended in divorce. "I had the fear of flying out of Washington myself and had to stay with my mom because I'd sold my

house, but if you hang on to God he'll send you the people you need. When I got back to Nebraska, my employer gave me a job so I could live independently again. My boss, who was a great mentor and had overcome a disability himself, was the owner of Seward Motor Freight. "

Kathy refuses to be a player in the blame game or hold on to anger or unforgiveness. "They have good sides," she says of her past relationships. "It's just that the relationships were unhealthy. We both had addictions. I had an addiction to a husband, but I learned the second time I don't enable. I did that too long."

As Kathy continued to counsel with the Commission for the Blind, it became clear her life had revolved around codependency.

Codependency is a relationship of mutual need -- the dependence of two people on another, especially when this reinforces mutually harmful behavior patterns.

As adults, codependent people have a greater tendency to get involved in relationships with people who are perhaps unreliable, emotionally unavailable or needy. And the codependent person tries to provide and control everything within the relationship without addressing their own needs or desires, setting themselves up for continued unfulfillment.*

"Say there's an alcoholic in your life" Kathy uses as an example as she explains codependency in simple terms. "He has a drinking problem and he's drinking all the family money away. You need to ask yourself, why did I pick this person, why do I pay the bills so they can squander the money? Maybe I do that because I'm afraid to confront him or because I'm afraid to be on my own, or maybe I actually enable. Maybe what I need to do is use tough love. You are not responsible for their addiction, you don't make them drink. When that person lays a guilt trip on you, you accept it because you have bad self-esteem from something that happened to you in your family origin or somewhere else.

"Sometimes people try to love the problem away -- trying to cook the partner's favorite meals or trying to looking nicer -- and it just gets worse.

"Everybody has boundaries," Kathy continues. "As a child, if you grow up in abuse you don't value your own boundaries and you don't stand up for yourself. In a relationship you have to stand up for your boundaries, and if somebody walks on them over and over and is abusive and blames you for things, if you accept that as your problem and your responsibility, that's not what God wants. I'm not saying get a divorce, what I'm saying is he would like you to break the cycle of abuse in your generation. That person has a deep need and they're replacing it with alcohol or whatever. They're in your circle and if you keep giving them too much, it's an enabling thing. You fall in love with an addict."

Kathy says she is learning how to break the cycle of codependency in her life and stand up for her boundaries: "I had to conquer blindness, but even more than that, I had to see that if you need a husband so bad that you'll let them mistreat you, then you're not hanging on to God enough. You have to be secure and a whole person in yourself first and then you attract the right person."

She also suggests counseling and reading lots of material on codependency.

KATHY DOESN'T allow thoughts of the past to drain her energy. "God won't give you energy for anxiety or worry -- it's not from him-- that will drain your energy. I had to learn the hard way but I'm catching on," she laughs at herself.

Instead, this 51-year old chooses to focus on the positive and keep physically fit. She runs three to four miles daily on a treadmill before heading off to work, runs half marathons and trains on her bike with a friend, as well as working out at a fitness center.

"I can see God's hand and I wonder where he's going to lead me, what he's going to do with me," she says with excitement. "If there's supposed to be a man in my life, I'm trusting God for a healthy relationship. Life is like a tapestry. On the back side is all these strings and knots and you can't tell what it is; it's a mess. Turn it over and the other side is a beautiful woven picture. When we're on earth we see the back side of the tapestry and none of it makes sense -- it's all knots. But when we're in heaven we see the other side and how it all fits the picture and it's beautiful.

"When we're going through life we keep making mistakes over and over, but God give us a new start," Kathy concludes. "The key is don't get caught up in hating someone else or blaming someone else. Work on your own addictions so it doesn't happen again."

* allaboutcounseling.com